

subject (an inundation of the Nile), are written entirely in Greek characters.

As to trace the changes and alternate progression and declination of mosaic, in anything like historic order, would not only be a more fitting occupation for the archaeologist than the architect, but would moreover occupy a far greater amount of time than it will be possible to devote to its illustration to-night. I shall, in preference, proceed to offer to your notice, in the first place, a slight analysis of its conditions and capabilities; and, secondly, the advantages of so studying its peculiarities, as to enable us most successfully to take advantage of all those salient points which most properly fit it for modern introduction.

The term *mosaic*, in its most extended sense, includes such a union of small portions of the same, or any different materials, as shall, by combination, produce an effect attainable by no other means. As applied to the fine arts, or considered as a minor department of them, it must assume two leading and distinctive forms—the *pictorial*, or that in which the imitation of a picture or other existing object is aimed at; and the *conventional*, or that in which architectural and geometrical forms only are portrayed.

Let us first then briefly examine the nature of *pictorial mosaic*. Among the Romans it soon rose to an unexampled state of popularity: it was adopted as a leading element in all their monumental and domestic decoration, and lined with its polished incrustation alike the walls, the pavements, and the vaults of their temples, baths, and dwellings; in the museums of the Vatican and the Capitol, and in the ruins of temples and baths, at Rome, at Pompeii, Pozzuoli, Baia, and in the gallery of the Studdi at Naples, ample evidence still exists of the universality of its employment, of the nature, and varied processes of its production, and of the extensive range of subjects selected for representation. Gods, centaurs, men, animals, landscapes, flowers, ornaments, and foliage, are depicted with equal ability; and we are probably indebted to these almost imperishable relics for the preservation of some of the lovely fancies of the great artists of antiquity, whose creations might have altogether passed away, had they not been recorded through this most durable of all materials; for we must not forget the constant habit of reproduction, among the artists and artisans of antiquity, and refuse to ascribe the invention of the artistic treatment of a legend to a master mind, because we may meet with its representation only in fragments of coarse and perhaps ill-drawn mosaic, or wall-painting.

In examining the nature of these subjects with relation to the positions for which they may have been designed, we cannot fail to be struck with the general congruity existing between the nature of the idea depicted, and the character of the apartment for the adornment of which it may have been destined. Thus, in the houses of Pompeii, we find portrayed in mosaic the faithful dog guarding the threshold, or the hospitable inscription hailing the visitor even in the doorway; in the atrium, or hall, a rich though simple pattern is elaborated; in the triclinium, or dining-room, we meet with the "opus asarotum," or representations of fragments of food, &c., dispersed upon the ground; in the gynæceum, or female apartments, subjects of ornament, foliage, animals, &c.; of the greatest delicacy; and in the grottoes for the preservation of the Laves, or household gods, and in the pavements near them, are to be found the noblest subjects and the most admirable works of art. This happy unity of idea is of course enhanced by a similar taste presiding over the distribution of the other pictorial embellishments. What a lesson should not this afford to people who are in the daily habit of decorating their dining-rooms with such prints as Mr. Eastlake's "Christ Mourning over Jerusalem," divided only from its pendant Mr. Landseer's "Laying down the Law," by a highly-coloured portrait of the proprietor's favourite child!

At first, only small cubes of stone and marble were employed, but very soon a want of greater brilliancy of colour than they could afford was felt, and oriental marbles of all kinds, porcelain, and glass, were pressed into the service, and laid upon a plaster backing with a strong lime cement. Many of the specimens yet remaining display an extraordinary delicacy of execution; the mosaic gene-

rally known as Pliny's doves, from the subjects consisting of some doves sitting, dressing their feathers, and sipping water from the edge of a metal basin, is probably the most brilliant example. It is right, perhaps, to remark, that the practice of the Romans in employing representations of figures, &c., for pavements, although almost universal among them, and sanctioned, as in the extraordinary pavement, by Beccafumi, in the Cathedral at Sienna, by some of the best masters of the revival of art in Italy, is still a reprehensible one, as it is contrary to all natural feeling to set one's heel upon an irregular surface, still less upon the face of a hero. Mr. Pugin makes, in his "True Principles," some admirable remarks on the proper design and peculiarities of pavements, both encaustic and properly mosaic. A right feeling should, I think, confine the employment of pictorial representations in mosaic to walls, and coverings or "revêtements" for vaults and cupolas.

It would occupy us too long to enter into the question of the subdivisions and nomenclature of all the Roman varieties of mosaic, but it is sufficient for us now to remark that they were numerous and various, and obtained in full perfection until about 200 years after Christ, when the art began to decline in both taste and execution, although not probably in popular estimation. When in the year 329 Constantine removed the seat of empire to Constantinople, he probably took many Roman mosaic workers with him, and, through their labours, the first churches erected by him were decorated. From them the art was doubtless handed down traditionally, and in transmission changed its character. The more oriental taste for gold and splendour soon superseded the purer practice of the Romans; and Byzantine glass mosaic started into life.

There seems every reason to believe that for many centuries the Greeks remained the almost exclusive workmen and designers in mosaic, and through their labours Italy and Sicily stand pre-eminent in the possession of churches and baptisteries whose walls are adorned with the gilded ground, and the gorgeously-draped and swarthy-visaged saints, so peculiarly Byzantine in character.

Byzantium, Asia Minor, and the Holy Land, once doubtless possessed many noble specimens of their Christian art, but the elements, wars, fires, and Mahometan whitewash, have deprived us of almost all those sources from whence modern oriental art probably derived much of its inspiration and peculiar character; and it is in connection with this subject that the interesting question arises as to the influence that the early decorative processes may have had in determining the subsequent character of conventional ornament in all styles: thus—the Arabs having at first adopted the general scheme of Byzantine architecture, and among its processes that of mosaic, and from want of drawings of Byzantine details, and of Greek architects, the style having naturally declined in integrity of character, while the mechanical processes would be retained traditionally among the workmen, this very mosaic work, which was at first only a subordinate means of decoration, would become a leading element in the minds of the Mahometan designers, and, from experiments and combinations made with small geometrical cubes of glass mosaic, they would be led naturally to that elaborately intricate style of pattern, which, when they emerged at length from the influence of Byzantine tradition, became so essential a character of all their compositions. Thus also no doubt did the traditional predilection for mosaic modify most materially, not only the plan and whole structure of the churches erected up to the year 1200 in Italy, but even the minuter details that characterise those monuments, and constitute their style.

Of the principal of these churches which yet retain their ancient mosaics, we extract from Lord Lindsay's most valuable history of Christian art, a chronological list, which appears fully supported by the Chevalier Bunsen, Mr. Gally Knight, and Ciampini. He enumerates those of Santa Sabina, Rome, 425; of Santa Maria Maggiore, 432; Santi Giovanni and Apollinare, at Ravenna, 440; San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, Rome, 578; of Sant' Agnese, Rome, 642; Santi Nereo ed Achille, Rome, 800; Santa Cecilia, Rome, 820; of Sant' Am-

brogio, Milan, 836, and of Santa Maria Nuova, Rome, 848.

Lord Lindsay remarks, that from the period of this last date (848), for more than two centuries, scarcely any mosaic work was done in Italy by Greek artists, as it was a season of war, misery, and barbarism, and we accordingly have in look in the commencement of the twelfth century for a revival of the art. We find it in the remarkable example executed in the church of San Clemente at Rome, 1112, and in it a new spirit, thus ably indicated by his lordship:—

"This mosaic is a most elaborate and beautiful performance, yielding to none in minuteness of detail and delicacy of sentiment. It is characterized, moreover, by a resuscitation of the symbolism of early Christianity, so long neglected, although in subordination to one of the traditional dramatic compositions—the crucifixion. On every account, therefore, it merits the most attentive consideration."

From this period, through the gorgeous decorations of St. Mark's, at Venice, of the churches of Monreale, and the Capella Palatina at Palermo, the cathedrals of Cefalu in Sicily, San Giovanni Batista at Florence, those of San Paolo fuori le mura, Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Giovanni Laterano at Rome, and many others, we trace pictorial mosaic of the Byzantine character down to as late, perhaps, as the year 1506.

In all those churches in which full latitude has been given to the employment of this kind of mosaic, such as that of St. Mark's at Venice, or Monreale in Sicily, we find the entire surface of the walls covered with these representations, all executed upon a gold ground, the subjects arranged in a perfect cycle of symbolism, and the conception, treatment, expression, and execution, in some cases of a very noble, in all of a very interesting character. It would be waste of time to expatiate on the effects produced by the system of decoration employed in these two last-mentioned buildings, but I may perhaps be justified in asking, what their appearance would have been now, had they been executed in such a material as fresco; and whether they would still appear as they do now, endowed with the godlike qualities of perpetual youth and beauty?

Nearly coeval with the gradual decline of pictorial mosaic work on the Greek system, started into life two new varieties, the Roman and the Florentine; the former a revival of the ancient Roman "opus vermiculatum," or minutely delicate picture produced by the insertion of the smallest pieces of coloured glass in very close proximity, and by watching their colours perfectly with those of the painting to be copied—reproducing a perfect imitation of it—the latter an attempt on the part of the Florentines to imitate the *modus operandi* of the ancient Roman "opus sectile," or mosaic composed of flat pieces or veneers of variously-coloured marbles, and to execute with such materials only imitations of all sorts of objects. The noblest example now existing of the application of this branch of the art of mosaic to architectural decoration, is probably that of the chapel of the Medici in the church of San Lorenzo at Florence. The most glorious specimen of Roman mosaic similarly applied is to be found in the beautiful decorations of that most magnificent cathedral, St. Peter's. It is this, or a similar mode of fabrication, that Mr. Barry will probably employ in the projected mosaic work in the new Houses of Parliament.

Even to this day both these branches of manufacture continue under royal patronage, and are preserved in their highest perfection in national manufactories both at Rome and Florence.

Turning now from our examination of the general nature of pictorial, to a brief consideration of conventional, or more strictly, architectural mosaic, we shall find, that in pavements, and occasionally on walls, it obtained universally under the Roman empire, principally in the forms of "opus tessellatum" and "opus sectile." The general character of the latter has been already indicated in its mention in connection with the modern Florentine mosaic. The former was composed generally of small cubes of marble, called *tessera*, with which all the largest and most important mosaic pavements of a geometric character, at Rome, were constructed; the contrast of colour being usually confined to that produced by black and white marble. Numerous specimens of this